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SUBJECT: STATE SECURITY FILES COME BACK TO HAUNT BULGARIA

REF: SOFIA 215

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle, for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

**¶11. (S/NF) SUMMARY:** The unfinished sixteen-year-old debate over Bulgaria's communist-era State Security files was unexpectedly revived in recent days when Interior Minister Rumen Petkov revealed that several prominent journalists and political figures, including the country's highest Islamic leader, had been agents. The disclosures revived public speculation as to who might have been a collaborator, prompting Petkov to publicly declare that none of the country's top leaders had been an agent of the communist regime. (Note: Information available to post contradicts this assertion.) Though Petkov is a powerful member of the governing Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), we do not believe that his actions represent government policy; they were likely prompted by a personal feud with a journalist, and have sent the country's political class scrambling. Fellow BSP leaders President Georgi Purvanov and Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev fear that opening the archives could do political damage to themselves and their allies, and view the issue as a distraction from efforts to secure EU accession in January 2007. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

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**¶12. (U)** Unlike other post-communist countries, Bulgaria has never fully released the files of the former State Security agency, which are housed at both the Ministry of Interior and the National Intelligence Service. A 1997 law granted partial access to the files only to those applying for high-ranking government posts or to people who were personally targeted or oppressed by State Security. In 2002, the 1997 law was replaced by the Classified Information Protection Act, which did not specifically list the security files as state secrets. According to this act, however, all documents issued before 2002 and stamped "confidential" must be kept for a period of 30, 15 or 5 years, depending on their level of sensitivity, and documents must either be destroyed or submitted to the Public State Archive within a year of their declassification. Still, formal declassification by a committee must occur in order for a document to be officially made public.

**¶13. (SBU)** Although these requirements apply to State Security files, they have not been implemented by either the Ministry of Interior or the National Intelligence Service, despite the expiration of classification terms for many of the three million classified documents being held. Occasional leaks to the media of the files' contents in recent years caused only sporadic public debate, due to a lack of political will to directly address the issue.

¶4. (U) The current controversy stems from Interior Minister Petkov's May 22nd press release containing a list of Bulgarian journalists who are former agents of the State Security. Petkov's action was ostensibly in response to another journalist's request that the secret files on her and media colleagues be released. The journalist claims she was motivated by a desire to clear her own name, and that she submitted her request after Petkov announced the forthcoming declassification of approximately 500,000 documents.

¶5. (U) The following week brought a second wave of names, again ostensibly in response to a journalist's request. Nikolai Barekov, newscaster for the BTV television network, submitted to Petkov a list of 47 high-ranking politicians, magistrates, and clerics, asking for information on their cooperation with State Security. No formal statement was issued by the MOI, but on his May 30 newscast, Barekov read aloud a response from the Interior Minister which named four figures as former State Security agents while absolving the other 43. The four figures included Bulgarian Chief Mufti Mustafa Alish Hadji as well as three MPs; Yunal Lutfi from the ethnic Turkish coalition member MRF, Krasimir Karakachanov from the right wing opposition VMRO, and Petar Beron from the extreme nationalist party ATAKA. In later statements to the press, Petkov said that all records of the Chief Mufti's collaboration had been destroyed, and added that Lutfi and Karakachanov had worked in the interest of the state, and had no reason to be ashamed of their service. He made no statement on Beron's activities.

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¶6. (SBU) Reaction to Petkov's announcements has been confused and heated. The right-wing opposition has largely criticized them as arbitrary, with some opponents characterizing them as an attempt to draw public attention away from the EU's recent critical assessment of the Interior Ministry's efforts in the fight against organized crime. Political analysts have swapped a variety of theories regarding Petkov's motives, with many describing his move as an act of personal revenge against the journalists -- in particular Georgi Koritarov, an influential talk show host and longtime critic of the BSP. In December, an appearance on Koritarov's show by Deputy Interior Minister Kamen Penkov quickly devolved into a bitter argument, with Koritarov allegedly describing Penkov as a "criminal." Penkov responded by hinting at knowledge of Koritarov's record of collaboration and cautioning the journalist to be more cautious with his criticism, warning "you know why I'm saying this."

The President's File?

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¶7. (SBU) Petkov's disclosures resurrected speculation that some of the country's most influential politicians are former State Security collaborators. The center-right opposition party led by former PM Ivan Kostov even called on President Purvanov to publicly declare whether he had been a State Security agent, in light of persistent rumors that Purvanov had consulted with the secret police on Macedonian issues in his former capacity as a historian. Petkov dismissed the allegations, announcing that the Ministry's archive contained no data on President Purvanov, Prime Minister Stanishev, or Parliament Speaker Pirinski.

¶8. (S/NF) NOTE: Information from another agency indicates that President Purvanov, like some other political figures of his generation, did in fact work with the State Security service during the former regime. Petkov's hasty denial may represent a realization of the danger of his ill-planned

statement, as may his May 31 statement that opening all archives would "destroy the state." END NOTE.

OPENING THE FILES -- FOR AND AGAINST

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¶ 9. (SBU) Purvanov has publicly registered his firm opposition to the files' declassification, stating that the debate on opening them was a mistake that "might push Bulgaria back." His words were echoed by Prime Minister and BSP Chairman Sergei Stanishev, who views the topic as "poisonous" to Bulgarian society at such a critical point in its history. According to Stanishev, the issue of declassification has no place on the national agenda at a time when the country must make superhuman efforts to meet the criteria for EU membership. Under Bulgarian law, the files must either be destroyed or released through the declassification process. Stanishev noted that some State Security files were destroyed in the early 1990s, and argued that since making only some of them public would be unfair, the files should be completely destroyed.

¶ 10. (U) While noting that the matter requires a political decision, Prosecutor General Boris Velchev insisted on complete declassification of all records that the communist political police kept on its agents. Sofia Mayor Boiko Borisov, a former chief secretary of the Interior Ministry, expressed a similar opinion, demanding publication of all State Security records on the Internet. Complete declassification of communist police records is also recommended by the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, which belongs to the ruling coalition, as well as by the center-right opposition groups of Union of Democratic Forces and Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB). Deputy DSB head Konstantin Dimitrov told us on June 5 that his party has already drafted a proposed law calling for the files to be opened under supervision of an impartial, nonpartisan "truth commission."

COMMENT

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¶ 11. (S/NF) Intelligence reporting and open source information indicate that Petkov's revelations were initiated solely to exact revenge on an unfriendly journalist, and are not part of a coherent political strategy. The disclosures have not gone down well with other BSP leaders -- particularly

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President Purvanov and Prime Minister Stanishev -- who are now unsure of how to put the genie back in the bottle. Though no top-level officials have been implicated, the uproar over this issue is about the last thing the government needs to see in the headlines as it mobilizes to meet EU requirements for 2007 accession. Despite some analysts' comments that the resurgence of interest in the State Security files is irreversible, the controversy is unlikely to result in any further declassification in the near term because of the government's fear of the political consequences -- especially with presidential elections scheduled for this fall. While most Communist bloc countries have already resolved this issue, Bulgaria is still wrestling with its past. Due to the time elapsed and the possibility that the existing files may have been tampered with over the years, Bulgaria's historical record in this area may always be suspect. END COMMENT.

Beyrle